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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001459

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AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: UNICEF Visitor: Child Labor Assessment Not
Possible This Year

REF: TASHKENT 1421; TASHKENT 1431

CLASSIFIED BY: Holly Lindquist Thomas, P/E Officer, Tashkent; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: UNICEF visiting Senior Child Protection Advisor Joanne Dunn met with DCM and poloff Monday, August 17 to discuss child labor and the upcoming cotton harvest. Dunn stated that it is "way too late" for an assessment to be planned and implemented during this year's cotton harvest. She discussed the likelihood of an assessment in the future, noting that the ILO has conditioned an assessment on a public admission that forced child labor exists in Uzbekistan. She also discussed trends in this area and UNICEF's next steps. End summary.

Likelihood of an ILO Assessment

¶2. (C) The cotton harvest in Uzbekistan generally begins in September and continues through October and sometimes into November, depending on rain levels and whether state-imposed quotas have been met. Last winter and spring, the international community was fairly uniform in calling on the GOU to invite an independent organization into the country to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the use of child labor in the cotton sector, which could then be used as an accepted baseline for discussing the problem and taking strides to address it. Unfortunately, the GOU has not issued a formal invitation, and according to Dunn, it is "way too late" for an assessment to be planned and implemented during the 2009 harvest.

¶3. (C) Although there may be other organizations that in theory could conduct an objective assessment, there seems to be general consensus among stakeholders that for Uzbekistan to show the world it is making a serious attempt to address child labor, it must invite the International Labor Organization (ILO) to do the assessment. According to Dunn, however, the ILO requires two

things from the GOU in addition to an invitation: 1) a public acknowledgment that forced child labor exists in Uzbekistan; and 2) absolute freedom in conducting a survey. Dunn stated that even if an invitation to do the assessment were forthcoming, the ILO is unlikely to perform an assessment without the public admission of guilt required in the first condition. (Comment: This is the first post has heard of these preconditions. While the second is a legitimate demand, the first is rather surprising, in that a public admission is neither critical for conducting a survey nor likely with a regime that consistently responds negatively to shaming tactics. End comment.)

¶4. (C) Dunn stated that she believes that if the ILO truly wanted to come in to Uzbekistan, it could do so on the basis of Uzbekistan's ratification and initial reporting under ILO 182, the Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination for the Worst Forms of Child Labor. She stated that the ILO is reluctant to do so at least in part due to strong NGO and union caucuses that argue that coming into Uzbekistan at all risks lending credibility to the Karimov regime. She also mentioned that the GOU-ILO relationship has been strained since the GOU made things difficult for the Tashkent-based ILO office, forcing its departure. She also said, however, that the ILO Director intends to visit Tashkent later this month, and that successful high-level meetings during that visit could help to get the relationship back on track. Whether or not the GOU-ILO relationship improves, however, any negotiations of an assessment will have to be directed at the 2010 harvest.

Trends

¶5. (U) Dunn cited some positive trends in the area of child labor over the past year. For example, she cited a Soros Foundation Report showing that in 2008, child labor was directed more toward older, rural children than it has been in the past. She also highlighted that it is now possible to talk about child labor in a political context, and that UNICEF is having some success with trainings and outreach programs (see reftels). She also mentioned a new initiative: the GOU recently set up a child labor hotline that is accessible to people in every province who have questions or concerns over child labor. Dunn stated that on a more macro level, the GOU has had some success diversifying its economy, thereby becoming less dependent on the cotton crop.

¶6. (U) Dunn also mentioned that some efforts to force Uzbekistan's hand on this issue have so far not been effective. She cited an International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) report finding that Uzbekistan has had no problem selling its cotton on the international market, and thus the Walmart-led boycott of Uzbek cotton has had little effect. She stated that ICAC has also concluded that Uzbekistan will never truly mechanize (an oft-cited measure proposed to reduce child labor), first because it is too expensive, and second because mechanization would devalue the cotton itself, as hand-picked cotton sells for a higher price on the world market.

Next Steps for UNICEF

¶7. (C) Dunn agreed that the GOU could do much more to address the child labor problem, and that raising salaries to a level where adult workers would take jobs in the fields could largely solve the child labor problem. Looking forward, Dunn stated that UNICEF

intends to conduct a technical economic analysis this fall, which will include an in-depth look at the true costs of using child labor (both economic and educational costs) versus the cost of using adult labor. They intend to recommend possible solutions, as well, and Dunn will be discussing with World Bank representatives later this week whether the World Bank could conceivably pay the difference in the costs associated with paying adults. UNICEF will also continue its existing outreach program, which will include a survey to get a better understanding of attitudes toward child labor.

Comment

18. (C) Regardless of the reason, the ILO may well be reluctant to conduct an assessment in Uzbekistan. It seems to be the only institution that is both capable of performing the assessment and well-respected enough that its results would be accepted throughout the international community, however. For that reason, post believes we should continue to push the GOU to formally invite the ILO to assess the use of child labor in the cotton harvest. For the ILO to refuse or impose unrealistic conditions lends legitimacy to GOU claims that it is taking appropriate steps to address child labor.

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